
U.S. NAVY MEMORIAL
8th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Addition of Bas-Relief Panels

Report to the National Park Service

October 7, 1999

Abstract

The National Park Service, on behalf of the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation, has submitted a proposal to modify the bronze sculpture walls of the U.S. Navy Memorial at 8th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. The proposal would add a significant number of bronze panels to the corners and interior faces of the two seat walls. The modification is intended to allow the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation to recognize additional naval units and events, to identify the memorial more clearly and to explain the global projection map, and to illustrate the historic development of naval vessels. The proposal to install four additional matching bas-relief panels on the seat walls is submitted to the Commission for preliminary and final approval. The overall proposal for the additional panels is developed to the concept design level.

Authority

Section 113 of Public Law 96-199.

Commission Action

The Commission:

- **Approves:**

- The preliminary and final plans for the **placement** of four bronze bas-relief panels on the outer faces of the granite trapezoidal blocks of the seat walls at the U.S. Navy Memorial, 8th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, as shown on NCPC Map. File No. 21.10(38.00)-40705;

- The preliminary and final **design** plans for one of the panels, pending the National Park Service's completion of the requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act, and with the understanding that the design of the other three panels will be submitted for Commission review.
- **Defers action on** the additional identifying and informational bronze panels or elements proposed for the seat walls, with the following comments:
 - Any additional bronze panels, letters, or emblems should be strongly limited.
 - The strong character of the granite trapezoidal blocks and the seat walls should be retained.
 - The Foundation might consider taking fuller advantage of the adjacent museum's exhibit space and programs to educate visitors about both the memorial and the history of American naval vessels.
 - If further identifying information at the memorial is deemed necessary, the Foundation might consider developing a proposal, perhaps one that uses letters on the walking surface of the memorial outside the map, in close collaboration with the reviewing agencies.

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BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

Twelve years after the U.S. Navy Memorial was dedicated, the U. S. Navy Memorial Foundation (the Foundation) proposes adding bronze bas-relief panels to the memorial. The Foundation's goals are to provide additional identification of the memorial, information about the global projection map, recognition of additional naval events and personnel, and an illustration of the development of naval vessels throughout the nation's history. The Foundation also believes that it is artistically important to have the bronze panels wrap around the seat walls and continue on the inside of the plaza.

The Foundation is prepared to present only visual simulations for much of its proposed work at this time. No site plans have been prepared.

Four Bronze Bas-Relief Panels Matching the Existing Panels

The Foundation seeks preliminary and final approval from the Commission for the addition of four bas-relief panels to the outside faces of the four trapezoidal end stones of the two seat walls. If the Commission were to approve the placement of the one panel, it would also need to approve the location and placement of the additional three panels so as to maintain the overall symmetry of the sculptural composition.

A dedication ceremony for the installation of one of the panels (illustrated in an attachment to this report) has been planned for November 1, 1999, and three of the four panels have been commissioned by the Foundation.

The four proposed new bronze panels, identical in size (36 7/8 inches by 32 3/4 inches) to the existing panels, are designed and supervised by Leo Irrera, the sculptor of three of the existing panels, in the vigorous, spacious style for which his work and the other memorial bas-relief bronzes are noted.

If feasible, the present westernmost panel, with its strong upright vertical figure on the left, would be moved to become the new end panel. The first of the newly created panels would take its place. If damage is unavoidable, Mr. Irrera has designed the new panel to be an appropriate end panel and it would be installed on the trapezoidal end stone.

Additional Bronze Panels, Emblems, and Letters

The visual simulations indicate that the Foundation would like to add bronze panels and lettering identifying the U.S. Naval Memorial, most likely with naval insignia and personnel, on the sloped outer and inner faces of the same four trapezoidal end stones of the seat walls. Text panels explaining the projection map would also be placed on the outside faces of the easternmost and westernmost stones. These bronze elements would be similar to the text panels now placed above each of the existing bas-relief panels.

The Foundation's visual simulations also indicate a proposal to install twenty rectangular bronze panels illustrating the history of naval vessels on the granite backs of the seats in the curved walls. Panels would be placed on all but the corner seats. The panels, identical in size (24 inches by 8 1/2 inches) and placed at an even height despite the change in grade within the memorial plaza, would be cast in shallow bas-relief (1/4-inch depth above the surface of the panel). All of the panels would illustrate vessels in elevation.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

The Commission reviewed the original memorial design and sculptural elements at four meetings between November 1983, and February 1987.

EVALUATION

Bronze Bas-Relief Panels Matching the Existing Panels

The staff recommends that the four bas-relief panels, identical in size and style to those already in place, be approved for placement on the outer faces of the four trapezoidal end stones.

The staff also recommends that the submitted design of one of the panels be approved. The panel is being completed at the foundry for dedication on November 1, 1999. Three of the four proposed additional bas-relief panels have been commissioned and plans for selecting the fourth are underway.

Although the installation of these bas-relief panels will alter the appearance and character of the trapezoidal end stones, the sloping leading edges of the outer faces of the stones will remain open to view. The uniformity of the proposed new bronze panels, of the same size and designed by the artist who created three of the existing panels, mitigates the proposed alteration, as does the Foundation's desire to commemorate additional events and units in the same manner as those already commemorated.

Additional Bronze Panels, Emblems, and Letters

The staff finds that the Foundation's overall proposal for additional panels (beyond the four bas-reliefs), as indicated in the visual simulations, would more fundamentally alter the character and use of the memorial, because of the extent of the proposed changes to the granite surface, the change in character of these bronze panels from the existing bronze panels, and, most significantly, the change in function of the seats and therefore of the memorial.

The great strength of the memorial, in addition to its evocative power during commemorative events, is its use by visitors and Washingtonians at times when formal events are not taking place. The memorial is a civic gathering place. The seats are inviting, and regularly used. The staff believes the seats would not be inviting if the seatbacks were covered with bronze bas-relief panels, because they would be uncomfortable to lean back against and would retain the sun's heat in the summer. More significantly, visitors would hesitate to sit on them and thereby cover panels from the view of others. The memorial's demonstrated contributions to civic life in Downtown Washington strongly indicate that the seats should be left as they are--inviting, and without commemorative material that would turn them into objects to view rather than objects to use.

As now proposed, the trapezoidal granite end stones would lose their differentiated character and function as framing elements if they were fully covered with bronze panels, letters, and emblems. The proposed bronze elements would detract from the quality and character of the existing (and new) bronze bas-reliefs. The staff believes, however, that some additional information, textual or emblematic, might be of educational and commemorative benefit. The staff invites the Foundation to work in close collaboration with the reviewing agencies in the development of possible alternatives to the submitted design concepts.

*COORDINATION*Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) reviewed the proposal at its meeting on July 15, 1999, and approved the installation of four additional bronze bas-relief panels, the naval vessel panels, and the engraving of "United States Navy Memorial" on the east and west trapezoidal end stones. CFA also approved in concept the triangular explanatory panels, recommending changes to the design and text. CFA also stated that it expected to review all new panels as they are designed.

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on September 15, 1999, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project had been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Fire Department; the Department of Public Works; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

*CONFORMANCE*Comprehensive Plan

The Navy Memorial is designated for Monumental and Decorative Parks in the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The memorial faces Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, which is a designated Special Street in the Preservation and Historic Features Element. The memorial is also located in a designated Special Place in this element.

National Environmental Policy Act

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), NPS has reviewed the potential environmental effects of the proposed action.

The existing Navy Memorial site is not subject to flooding or any unusual subsurface or environmental conditions. Circulation routes for both pedestrian and visitor vehicular traffic are reasonably accommodated at the existing site.

In accordance with the NPS Environmental Compliance Field Guide (NPS-12), Section 3.4(C), paragraph 5, the proposed new information plaques and sculpture are Categorically Excluded (CATEX) in accordance with NEPA regulations.

National Historic Preservation Act

NPS has initiated consultation with the DC SHPO concerning the additional panels. An MOA for the original memorial was completed in 1987.